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**OPERATION CROWN JEWEL SMASHES INTERNATIONAL COCAINE CONSPIRACY;
21 CHARGED HERE, IN COLOMBIA AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today the unsealing of an Indictment charging 16 people in the United States, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic with participating in an international conspiracy to import cocaine into the United States from Colombia and the Dominican Republic. The arrests were the culmination of Operation Crown Jewel, an investigation involving the cooperative efforts of law enforcement in the United States, Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

The unsealing of the Indictment follows the arrests this morning in Colombia of two of the alleged ringleaders of the conspiracy, PAULINO de la SALCEDO-GENAO and MAURICIO RIVAS-GOMEZ. In the past week, MARCOS PENA-GONZALEZ, one of the alleged heads of the New York distribution cell as well as an alleged coordinator of cocaine loads from the Dominican Republic, was arrested in the Dominican Republic. Also charged and arrested in the New York metropolitan area were ANDREA NUNEZ, LEYDA SELKOW,

JOSE ANGEL CASTANEDA, a/k/a "Balthazaar Garcia," MIGUEL SANTOS, RAMON ALMONTE, OSCAR CARINO, GABRIEL POLANCO, SARITA GREGORIO, and CESAR ROBLES, (the "Defendants") all of whom are now in law enforcement custody in the United States. Four additional defendants are fugitives. Colombian authorities also arrested five additional individuals who are being charged in Colombia.

The Indictment charges the Defendants with conspiring to distribute hundreds of kilograms of cocaine in New York City and elsewhere. Specifically, MARCOS PENA-GONZALEZ and ANDREA NUNEZ are charged with leading a cocaine distribution network based in New York City which received cocaine from sources in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico.

ALEX VAZQUEZ, VICTORIA SILVA, MIGUEL SANTOS, JUAN ESPINO, VENICIO MARTINEZ, GABRIEL POLANCO, SARITA GREGORIO, and RAMON ALMONTE are charged with receiving multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine from PENA-GONZALEZ for distribution in the greater New York City area, including New Jersey. According to the Indictment and the requests for provisional arrest warrants, on October 22, 2003, ALMONTE was arrested following his receipt of 4 kilograms of cocaine from NUNEZ and LEYDA SELKOW.

OSCAR CARINO is charged with supplying PENA-GONZALEZ with multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine CARINO possessed locally. JOSE ANGEL CASTANEDA, a/k/a "Balthazaar Garcia," is charged with supplying NUNEZ and PENA-GONZALEZ's organization with large quantities of cocaine that CASTANEDA transported from

sources of supply in Mexico. On November 15, 2003, NUNEZ, LEYDA SELKOW, CASTANEDA and CESAR ROBLES were arrested following NUNEZ, SELKOW and CASTANEDA's receipt of 28 kilograms of cocaine delivered in New Jersey by CASTANEDA and ROBLES.

LEYDA SELKOW is charged with assisting NUNEZ and PENA-GONZALEZ with the distribution of cocaine in the New York area, and with serving as a liaison between NUNEZ and PENA-GONZALEZ's New York distribution network and cocaine sources of supply in Colombia, including MAURICIO RIVAS GOMEZ and PAULINO de la SALCEDO-GENAO.

According to the Indictment and requests for provisional arrest warrants, NUNEZ and PENA-GONZALEZ's organization was distributing approximately 25 kilograms of cocaine per week in the New York area, frequently using coded language, referring to kilograms of cocaine as "pretty girls," "computer discs," and "invitations to Sammy Sosa's birthday party."

If convicted, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a \$4 million fine, or twice the gross gain or loss resulting from the crime.

Mr. KELLEY praised the investigative efforts of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Colombian National Police and the National Drug Police in the Dominican Republic. He said the investigation is continuing.

Assistant United States Attorneys NEIL BAROFSKY and

SAMUEL G. WILLIAMSON are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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